

BROWNIE

THE · STORY · OF · A · NAUGHTY · LITTLE · RABBIT



STORY
AND ILLUSTRATIONS
BY DOROTHY WALL



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BROWNIE



ON THE WAY TO THISTLE-DOWN TOWN

BROWNIE

The story of a naughty little rabbit

STORY and DECORATIONS

By *Dorothy Wall*

ANGUS & ROBERTSON LIMITED

89 Castlereagh Street

Sydney

1940

*Set up, printed and bound
in Australia by
Halstead Press Pty Limited,
9-19 Nickson Street, Sydney
1940*

*Registered in Australia for
transmission through the
post as a book*

*Obtainable in London from
Angus & Robertson Limited,
48 Bloomsbury Street, W.C.1*



Dedicated to

Little boys with dirty hands
and
Little girls with clean frocks.



A home study
Mrs Bobtail with her son & daughter
Taken from "The Bunnie's Weekly."



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CHAPTER I



HAVE you ever walked down a bush track with bracken fern growing along each side, and noticed here and there a hole in the fern, or perhaps a little mound of earth at the doorway? If you're lucky you may have seen a bunny scamper away. You'd know it was a bunny by its funny little white tail bobbing through the undergrowth, even if you'd never seen its ears or whiskers. Some people will say:

"Oh, it's only a rabbit."

Only a rabbit indeed! How foolish some grown-up people are! Just as if a bunny is not a very important person. Why! he has to wash his ears just like all little boys and girls. And don't think for *one* minute that Mrs Rabbit does not inspect them afterwards. Many a young "rab" has had a smart cuff over the ears and sent away to clean them again. Then there are his whiskers to be cleaned as well. These are most important. What rabbit would wish to be seen with dirty whiskers! And his paws! Such soft pretty little things. They must be washed as well; and I'm sure—quite sure—that somewhere the bunnies have the



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softest brush hidden away, and kept just for this purpose. And his beautiful brown eyes! Aren't they the colour of the softest brown earth! Oh! and I nearly forgot his pretty dear little nose! Have you ever felt a bunny's nose? It's the softest, sweetest wee thing that ever was made. He wrinkles it in the most surprising way when a juicy thistle-leaf is held near.

Now you know how very important a rabbit can be. And if you had looked down a certain burrow among the bracken fern, one moonlight night about a month ago, you'd have *seen* how very important an important rabbit can be. So "tush" and "posh" to those "grown ups" who say "It's only a rabbit!"

Mrs Bobtail and her two children Brownie and Velvet Paws were frightfully busy, scurrying about like scalded cats tidying up little piles of grass, patting a rumpled mound of earth, and brushing the walls with a little broom made of grass. Mrs Bobtail was spring-cleaning, and had promised Brownie and Velvet Paws a picnic on the morrow in Farmer Skinty's garden, if they helped her with her work.

"We need a new broom," Brownie said, as he pulled a few wisps of grass from the one he held in his paws.

"Run outside and make a new one for me," his mother said, as she bustled about. "But don't be long; we must finish this cleaning soon."

"I'll be as quick, as quick as can be," Brownie said as he ran through the tunnel and outside; but he was not prepared for the surprise that greeted his eyes. There were Farmer Skinty and his wife collecting bundles of dry grass and twigs, and talking about "bonfires."

"Bonfires!" said Brownie to himself. "I wonder what they are. I'll follow them and see." So creeping ever so silently through the grass, he followed Farmer Skinty and his wife over to their farm. His surprise was greater than ever when he saw quite a number of children jumping around a pile of grass and



"We need a new broom,"
Brownie said.

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sticks, clapping their hands and altogether behaving in a most extraordinary manner—to Brownie's way of thinking.

He hid behind a bush, and his eyes grew as round as saucers as the whole pile suddenly burst into flames that went crackling up to the sky.

"Now they've done it!" he cried excitedly, and was just about to rush home and tell the news to his mother when—*bang!* up shot something into the air and burst into beautiful colours. The children clapped their hands and laughed at the tops of their voices. But Brownie nearly jumped out of his skin with fright.

"What next!" he exclaimed, as he crouched as near to the earth as he could.

Bung!—Bung!—Such a dreadful noise came from the bonfire that poor Brownie trembled all over.

But as the bangs and cracks came rapidly one after the other, he grew quite brave, and in a few minutes began to enjoy the fun. Being a little boy rabbit he naturally thought of all kinds of naughty things he'd like to do with those bungers if only he could get hold of one, so waiting patiently until the children and Farmer Skinty had gone inside the house, he cautiously tiptoed over to the place where the bonfire had been and, searching round in the grass, he found a double bunger. Not knowing what it was, he handled it very carefully and smelled it too. Then searching again among the dead crackers and embers he found the box of matches that Farmer Skinty had used.

"That's lucky," he said to himself as he picked up the box. "Now I'll give Mrs Skinty a surprise."

Running over the garden, he came to the house, and peeped in at an open window. Such a noise he heard—spluttering and splashing; but the sight he saw was weirder still. There stood Farmer Skinty in a tub of water—no clothes on—and covered with soap from head to foot. He was rubbing with all his might and main, jerking his arms out in the most extraordinary way,

A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

and splashing soap-suds everywhere. He rubbed the suds all over his face and head, and blew the water from his nose like a whale, then with a loud wallow he plunged down in the tub. Brownie was thunder-struck. He expected to find Mrs Skinty sitting in a chair knitting when he peeped through the window, and here was a sight he'd never heard of or dreamed of before.

"Ah, that's good!" Farmer Skinty exclaimed as he heaved around in the tub. "Makes a fellow feel alive."

Waiting to hear no more, Brownie very carefully struck a match and lit the wick of the double bungler, then, like a flash of lightning, he threw it straight at Farmer Skinty.

Bung!—Bung! The bath-room shook and quivered. With a wild yell Farmer Skinty leapt out of the tub and, in doing so, upset it.

"I'm shot! I'm shot!" he cried at the top of his voice, and covered with soap and dripping with water, he rushed from the bath-room, just managing to snatch a towel as he went.

"Great Scott!" Brownie exclaimed, "he seems to be frightened. I'd better be going home." As he ran round the house a dreadful noise came through an open window and an angry voice said:

"John! just look at all the water on my carpet. Go and dress yourself."

It was Mrs Skinty growling, and as Brownie peeped over the window-sill he saw her standing



"I'm shot! I'm shot!"
he cried.

BROWNIE

there in her nightie, with her hair in dozens of curling-pins. She held a candle above her head and gazed in amazement at her husband, who stood blinking and shuddering with fright. Except for the towel wrapped round the middle of him, he was just patches of soap-suds, skin, and hair. He stood in a pool of water and wiped the streams from his eyes.

"I can't go back," he growled. "I'm shot!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" Mrs Skinty replied angrily. "Let me see where you're shot?"

"I'm shot all over!" Farmer Skinty roared with temper. "Where's my gun?"

"In the kitchen," his wife replied. "But you can't go running about like that. Put some clothes on."

"Give me a safety-pin!" Farmer Skinty demanded, and his wife tremblingly held one out to him. Pulling the towel round himself, and gritting his teeth savagely, he pinned the towel in place, then stamping out of the room, he went in search of his gun.

Brownie ran as hard as he could and made for safety behind his bush.

The back door flew open and out rushed Farmer Skinty, shouting at the top of his voice.

"Where are you? You coward. Come out in the daylight!"

He rushed here and there, without seeing any one—then went inside again, muttering and growling. The door banged with a dreadful bang, and darkness and silence returned to the night.

"Gosh! he's angry!" Brownie said as he pattered home through the bush. "Fancy getting annoyed over that!"

He remembered his broom, and stopped to gather the dry grass on his way, then slipping quietly along the burrow, he was at home once more.

A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

"You've been a long time gathering a few pieces of grass," Mrs Bobtail remarked. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, just down the track!" Brownie said innocently.

"Well, you're too late to help now—all the cleaning is done," his mother grumbled, "and it's time for bed. Mrs Benjamin Rabbit is coming over to have a word with me, so off to bed both of you, and remember, we go for a picnic to-morrow." With that Mrs Bobtail ruffled up the little piles of dry grass where her children slept. She had just settled down to a quiet chat with Mrs Benjamin Rabbit, when Brownie poked his head up and cried:

"Please, mother, I want a drink of water." And Velvet Paws cried:

"Please, mother, I want a lettuce-leaf."

"Go to sleep, both of you!" Mrs Bobtail ordered in a stern voice. "And Brownie, remember—rabbits do—not—drink—water."

"She's scotty!" whispered Brownie to Velvet Paws as he snuggled down in his bed.

At daybreak Mrs Bobtail was up, and with her two children, crept quietly out of the burrow. The dew was still on the grass, and everything had that soft earthy smell. Even the thistle-leaves looked soft, and the bracken fern had lost its hard brown colour.

"Now children," Mrs Bobtail whispered, "creep *very* silently, as Mrs Fox may be still about."

Through the rabbit lanes they scampered, and presently came to the opening where lay Farmer Skinty's farm.

"Oh, look at the lettuces!" Brownie whispered as he sucked a paw at the very thought of the juicy young leaves.

"Tuck up your dress, Velvet Paws," Mrs Bobtail advised as she picked her way among the young pea plants.

"Now eat as much as you like—only the very youngest leaves and pods, remember. I don't want you both to be ill."



"Keep out! Keep out!"
Mrs. Bee buzzed angrily.

A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

The three bunnies nibbled and gobbled until three little tum-mies looked more like footballs than anything else.

"Oh—I've got a pain," Velvet Paws cried in a plaintive voice.

"Poke out your tongue!" Mrs Bobtail ordered as she rushed to her little daughter.

"Ah! I thought so!" she said as she scooped out of Velvet Paws's mouth a pawful of dirt.

"What do you want to eat the roots for?" she demanded crossly. "Open your mouth widely!" And as she gave her order, she poked her paw right down Velvet Paws's throat. "Dear! dear!" Mrs Bobtail sighed, as the operation ended. "What a greedy child!"

Meanwhile Brownie had wandered away by himself, and the farther he went the more interesting everything became. He scampered through the rows of carrots and beans, and came at last to a beautiful rose garden. He put up his little soft nose to smell a large red bloom, and was startled to find a nasty sting came from it.

"Good gracious!" he said, rubbing his nose with his paw. "Whatever did that!"

"I did!" buzzed a tiny voice. "And I'll sting you again if you poke your nose in here!"

"Oh! Good morning, Mrs Bee," Brownie said politely, as he caught sight of the busy little creature. "What are you doing in there?" And he very nearly poked his nose in the rose again.

"Keep out! Keep out!" Mrs Bee buzzed angrily. "Can't you see I'm collecting pollen?"

"Oh!" said Brownie, as he held his breath with wonder. "What do you want it for?"

"For the hive of course," Mrs Bee answered. "And I've orders not to return until my baskets are full."

"Baskets!"—Brownie had never heard of such things before.

BROWNIE

"Yes! Baskets," Mrs Bee said angrily. "Can't you see them on my hind legs?"

Brownie gazed very hard, and there he saw two tiny bags, and he watched with amazement Mrs Bee filling them.

"Och!" she said disgustedly. "These roses are no good. There's not enough pollen in them to half fill one basket—let alone two."

"What'll you do?" Brownie asked sympathetically. "If you've orders to fill your baskets, you'll have to do it."

"You mind your own business!" Mrs Bee said rudely, as she took the first good look at Brownie.

"And you mind yours, and don't sting rabbits on the nose again," Brownie said boldly.

Hearing this Mrs Bee flew straight past Brownie's nose and gave him such a fright that he fell back into the rose-bush.

"Help! Help!" he cried as the thorns tore his little trousers. But no help came. He was fastened hard and fast, and with every move he made, more thorns pierced his little body.

"Gosh!" he cried in temper, as he kicked frantically and snapped at the bush savagely, "I'll die if I don't get out!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" a hearty chuckle came from close by. "So you're caught, and a fine rabbit-pie you'll make, my young lad," said a deep gruff voice.

Brownie looked up horror-stricken to find Farmer Skinty's great rough hands reaching out to grab him.

"Mind my tail! It's caught!" he cried in alarm.

"Well, it's so small that a pie will be just as nice without it!" Farmer Skinty replied, as he grabbed Brownie by the ears and carefully pulled him out of the rose-bush.

"You and your relations I've no respect for," Farmer Skinty said as he shook poor Brownie. "I just saw your mother and your sister gobbling my peas, and it's lucky for them I've a stiff leg, or I'd have had them too!"



"You'll be rabbit pie by dinner time."
Farmer Skinty replied.

BROWNIE

"I wish you'd got stiff all over—even your whiskers!" Brownie cried as he kicked violently.

"Let me go! Let me go!" he screamed, "or I'll eat all your cabbages up!"

"You'll be rabbit-pie by dinner-time, my young thief," Farmer Skinty replied. "I'll get my wife to bake a flaky pastry all over you, and I'll gobble your kidneys just like you gobbled my peas."

"How do you know I've got kidneys?" Brownie asked as he kicked again.

"Pon my soul. You're the cheekiest rabbit I've come across," the Farmer said as he tucked the kicking little bunny in his coat.

"I'll bite all the buttons off his shirt," Brownie said to himself as he wriggled round inside the coat, and sure enough he set to work immediately and bit two off—one after the other.

"It's no good biting your nails and playing up like that!" Farmer Skinty said as he heard the crackles inside his coat.

Brownie wriggled right round to the back of Farmer Skinty's shirt, and kicked and kicked more savagely than ever. He tore great holes in the shirt and then snap! a brace gave way.

"Jumping Jacko!" Farmer Skinty cried as his trousers began to tumble, "the young thief'll eat *me* if I don't get him out."

But he couldn't grab the young thief, for Brownie dived down the back of his trousers, right down the leg to the ground.



Snap! a brace gave way.

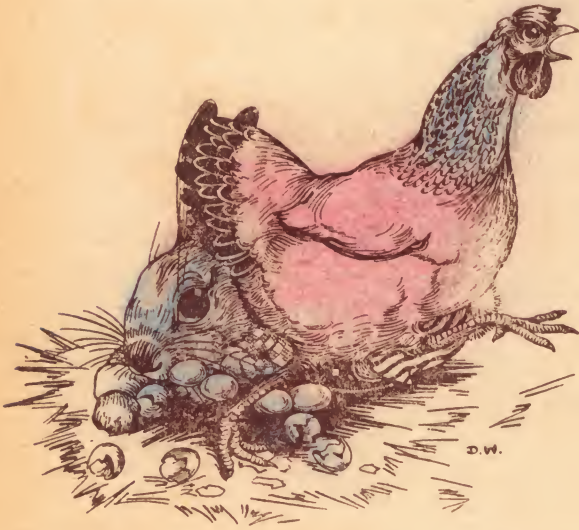
A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

It was all over before Farmer Skinty had time to realize what had happened.

"Pon my soul!" was all he could say as he stood there scratching his head.

"He's no rabbit!" he added, when he had recovered from his surprise. "He's something belonging to the devil!"

Brownie did not stop to look and wonder what Farmer Skinty thought or said. All he noticed was a gate open and dozens of boxes lying about—just the place to hide in. He rushed through the gate panting with fright and ran for the nearest box. Round the corner of it he raced, and into it he hopped. Everything seemed in a frightful muddle, and he felt feathers all over him and savage pecks on his ears. He shut his eyes tightly and pushed right into the middle of the feathers. And he kept on pushing until he was right under them. Everything was as black as ink.



Poor Mrs. Hen gave an extra loud squawk and dashed off her nest.

"Squawk! Squawk!" the old hen shrieked as she tried to claw and peck the intruder; but Brownie only wriggled in closer than ever. He felt hard warm things all round him, and without any warning whatever, the wretched things began to crack! crack! and nasty sticky stuff seemed to be everywhere. Poor Mrs. Hen gave an extra loud squawk and dashed off her nest. What a sight!



"Get out of this!"
Mr. Rooster ordered

A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

Brownie lay amongst cracked and broken eggs. His body was covered with what looked like scrambled eggs. And, oh, his pretty trousers! Well, the least said about them the better.

"Silly old goat!" Brownie muttered as he shook himself and blinked with astonishment. "She might have sat here a bit longer!"

But hardly had he collected his thoughts, when round the corner of the box Mr Rooster appeared with his tail waving like a banner and the light of battle in his eye. Behind him came the poor old hen, who did nothing but cackle and make the most dreadful fuss that only an old hen can make.

"There he is! There he is!" she screamed, and immediately swooned. She fell with a flop right on her back and her eyes turned up in the most pathetic manner. Her legs twitched as they stiffly stuck up in mid air, and hens and hens appeared from nowhere, all cackling and squawking at the tops of their voices.

"Get out of this!" Mr Rooster ordered, as he made a spring right on top of Brownie.

Poor Brownie fought and kicked and bit, and Mr Rooster clawed with his great talons.

"You've killed all the chickens!" he screamed. "My best white leghorn chickens!"

Just at this moment he stepped back to prepare for another spring; and Brownie, seeing his chance for escape, made a rush past him, scattering the hens in all directions. Straight through the gate he rushed, away across the yard, under a fence, and plonk! into a haystack.

"Whew!" he murmured as he wiped his face with his paw. "Rabbit-pie and roosters!"

"What's that! What did you say?"

"Good gracious!" He'd no sooner escaped from a dreadful fate and here was something else.

BROWNIE

"I wasn't saying a thing!" Brownie said softly as he cautiously peeped round the haystack.

"My mistake! My mistake!" a voice replied in a strange gurgly tone. "Have you seen any ants about?"

"Ants!" said Brownie as he sat up in surprise. "I've just escaped from a rooster."

"Well, well!" the gurgly voice replied. "Fancy not noticing if any ants were about. I'm sure I'm on the right track, as I can smell them a mile off."

"It's eggs you can smell!" Brownie said disgustedly.

"That's it!" the gurgly voice replied. "Ants' eggs!"

"Ants haven't eggs!" Brownie said scornfully.

"Yes they have! And they've hundreds of 'em. I know better than you," the gurgly voice replied. Then Brownie nearly jumped out of his skin as he saw in front of him the strangest and ugliest creature he'd ever seen in all his life.

"Spooks!" Brownie cried as he jumped in the air.

"What's that! What's that!" the funny animal said as he looked very surprised. "My word! but you are good on the jump!"

"You'd make a snail jump if he met you," Brownie said as he panted with fright.

"Indeed!" his companion said rather curiously. "Haven't you met any of my relations?"

"Good gracious! Have you relations?" Brownie asked in an amazed tone. "What are their names?"

"Such ignorance!" the strange animal snorted. "Why, we're one of the curiosities of Australia. But *you*!" Here he looked right down his long nose with contempt. "*You* and your relations. You're *very* common. You're found all over the world and I've heard you called a *pest*!"

"What's that?" Brownie asked.

"What's what?" his friend replied.

A VISIT TO FARMER SKINTY

"A *pest!*" Brownie replied.

"Well *you're one!*" said the funny animal crossly.

"Well—what are you?" Brownie asked still wondering.

"Me! Why I'm Mrs Echidna."

"What a funny name!" Brownie said as he gazed at his friend. "Say it again, please."

"Mrs Echidna," his friend said again.

"Sounds like a sneeze!" cheeky Brownie said as he gave a loud "kerchoo!"

"Oh don't bother to call me that noise," Mrs Echidna said rather crossly. "Call me 'Chiddy,' and be done with it."

"That's much easier to remember," Brownie said as he looked his friend up and down.

"I'd never expect a rabbit to have any intelligence," replied Mrs Echidna.

"What's intelligence?" Brownie asked again.

"Oh! You make me tired," Mrs Echidna sighed. "Sit down alongside me while I tell you all about myself, and then perhaps *you'll* have a little intelligence when I've finished."

"Is it something to eat?" Brownie asked once more.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! It's really painful!" Mrs Echidna groaned.

"What is?" Brownie asked.

"*You are!*" Mrs Echidna shouted. "Sit down at once and listen, and don't keep interrupting me."

"All right, Mrs Chiddy," Brownie said politely. "Please tell me everything. And don't forget about the ants."

CHAPTER II



Mrs CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

“WELL, now, where shall I start?” Mrs Chiddy remarked.

“Start with your nose—it’s so funny,” Brownie replied.

“Oh well. Might as well start there as anywhere else,” Mrs Chiddy answered. “To begin with I must correct you. That’s my beak—it’s not a nose.”

“Good gracious!” Brownie murmured. “How strange.”

“Yes!” Mrs Chiddy replied. “And you’ll notice that I’ve no teeth; but take a look at my tongue.” As she said this she poked out a long tongue that came from her beak. It looked just like a worm.

“What a long tongue!” Brownie gasped.

“Yes, it *is* long—it’s for scooping up ants,” Mrs Chiddy said proudly.

“Don’t you eat lettuce-leaves?”

“How could I eat leaves, with no teeth to nibble them? No! I live on ants and nothing else. But please don’t interrupt me again, or you’ll still have no intelligence when I’ve finished my story.” And Mrs Chiddy slowly curled herself into a ball.



Oh! Oh! what are those sticks?
Brownie interrupted again.

BROWNIE

"Oh, Oh! What are those sticks?" Brownie interrupted again, pointing to Mrs Chiddy's body.

"These are my spines. You see how I can curl myself up and make them stick out if I wish to, or if I change my mind I can make my spines lie down so that you can hardly see them. And I've something else you rabbits haven't."

"What's that?" Brownie asked, his wonderment growing every minute.

"I've spines on my tongue and the roof of my mouth," Mrs Chiddy said proudly.

"It must be prickly," Brownie said in a whisper.

"I've no tail to speak of," Mrs Chiddy said in an off-hand way, "but that's neither here nor there."

"Mine's fastened in the proper place," Brownie said haughtily.

"What's that?" Mrs Chiddy snapped.

"Mine's fastened in the proper place—not here nor there, as you said yours is." And Brownie showed his friend his little white tail.

"It's useless!" she replied coldly.

"And now that that's settled—just take a look at my strong claws. I dig out the ants' nests with these and then, of course, suck them up with my tongue."

"Where's your nose?"

"Look at the end of my beak and you'll see it. In case you don't know—that's to smell with. Some people are silly enough to think I'm guided to ants' nests by instinct. Don't you make any mistake about it—I *smell* them out."



"Mine's fastened in the proper place"

MRS CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

"What else is there about you that I haven't got?" the little bunny inquired.

"Ah! now we come to the most curious thing of all," his friend replied. "Look here! I've a pouch."

"Good gracious!" Brownie gasped in astonishment. "What's that for?"

"My word! You may well ask," Mrs Chiddy said as she displayed her pouch. "Just take a peep inside."

He cautiously peeped, and to his surprise saw two eggs nestled softly against the fur.

"In a short time the warmth from my body will hatch those eggs, and I'll have two babies. And I'll carry them round with me—still in my pouch—until they are old enough to creep along the ground." She closed her pouch again so that the eggs would keep warm.

"I don't like eggs!" Brownie said decidedly. "Mrs Hen lays eggs."

"Oh, they're very common!" Mrs Chiddy said as she sniffed the air. "No wonder you don't like them. Chiddy eggs are different."

"Can you eat them?"

"Eat them! Did you say *eat them*?" Mrs Chiddy glared at Brownie. "Our eggs are far too precious to eat," she sniffed indignantly.

"I suppose they've got spines in them and nobody would want to eat them," Brownie retorted rudely.

Mrs Chiddy bristled. "Now, look here, my young lad, you're getting just a little too impudent for my liking. I think it's time you were off."

"I'm waiting for that thing you said I'd get when you'd told me your story," Brownie replied.

"What thing?"

"That thing you call 'intelligence'!"



"Just watch me,
Puffkins said proudly."

MRS CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

"Ants' pants!" Mrs Chiddy exclaimed. "You're as dull as a pumpkin. I can see I've wasted my precious time on you. Your mother must be a very dull person. Go home and tell her to give you just a little intelligence—and don't come round me again. *Pest!* that's what you are."

"Oh well, there's no need to get snaky," Brownie said rudely, "and anyway, I was just going. 'Cause I *hate* the smell of ants."

Mrs Chiddy, raising all her spines until she looked a dreadful bristly and spiky creature, made a dart at Brownie:

"Be off!" she shouted.

Brownie knew it was time to go, and ran as fast as he could, over the garden and across the paddocks, until he found the rabbit-tracks. Then he slowly sauntered home to find his mother and Velvet Paws in tears.

"Oh, my dear Brownie," his mother cried as she caught sight of him. "We thought you'd be rabbit-pie by now, and we've cried and cried."

"I've been talking to Mrs Chiddy," Brownie said excitedly, "and she has a pouch with two eggs in it."

"That's strange!" Mrs Bobtail said, as she dried her eyes.

"Yes!" Brownie cried, dancing up and down. "And she said if I came home you'd give me some intelligence."

"I never smack my children," Mrs Bobtail replied, "but there's no doubt you deserve a good intelligence. Just look at your trousers! And what is all this sticky stuff on you for? Feathers, too, of all things. Oh! It's no wonder I suffer from headaches! You bad, bad boy." Mrs Bobtail licked her paw and tried to clean her dirty son; but the feathers stuck in her mouth as she moistened her paw. They made her sneeze, and after persevering for some time with the cleaning, she found it was a hopeless task.

"I'm sick of you! I feel my head starting to ache again, and no spinach-leaves about to stop it. Go away and rub yourself in the grass."

BROWNIE

Brownie rolled over and over in the grass and dried bracken, but it made little improvement. Then standing up and patting his trousers, he stood in front of his mother again.

"Yes! Mrs Chiddy is right, and a good intelligence is what you need, even if it is a smacking!"

"I'm sure it's not a smacking," Brownie said boldly, "'cause she said she'd never expect intelligence from rabbits, and she said we were *Pests*!"

"Oh! Indeed!" Mrs Bobtail was astounded. "Well, we'll go down to Thistle-down town, and I'll see my friend Judge Hare. He's sure to be able to tell me what 'intelligence' is."

"And *Pests*," Brownie said excitedly.

"Sh-h-h! Don't say that word," Mrs Bobtail said as she turned rather pale. She felt all muddled at the very sound of it, as she'd heard it several times before when men came along with guns and dogs and traps, always leaving a trail of sorrow behind them.

"We'll start right away," she said as she tried to be cheerful. "Dear, dear, you *do* look untidy, Brownie; but it can't be helped. I've done my best! And Velvet Paws—tie your bonnet on." Dear little Velvet Paws was always neat and clean—she looked sweet in her pink frock with the blue spots on it and her bonnet to match. She never ran away; but played all day in the daisy-patch outside the burrow door, or chased butterflies as they fluttered round the tea-tree bushes.

Mrs Bobtail put on her best apron and frock. It was pink with blue spots on it—just like Velvet Paws's, and Brownie was dressed in his best suit of green, which his mother had put on him at the last minute, in desperation. Away they danced down the track to Thistle-down town—past old Mrs Fox's house (thank goodness she was out), till they came to Judge Hare's house.

"Now don't forget to use your handkerchief, Brownie, if your



"No back chat!"
Judge Hare thundered.

BROWNIE

nose needs blowing; and for goodness' sake don't scratch in front of Judge Hare."

Mrs Bobtail raised the knocker on the door and gave three loud knocks. In a few minutes feet shuffled down the passage-way and the door was very slowly opened—just an inch:

"Good morning, Judge Hare," Mrs Bobtail said sweetly. "Could I see you about something very important?"

"Yes! Yes! Come in," Judge Hare said as he coughed and sneezed.

"Good gracious, you have a bad cold," Mrs Bobtail said sympathetically, as she made signs to her children to keep at a safe distance.

"It's the asthma." Judge Hare wheezed and coughed again . . . "I think the house is damp . . . Come into my study."

Judge Hare sat down on a high stool in front of a very large book. Its edges were all tattered and torn and, as he put on an enormous pair of spectacles, he looked exceedingly clever. Next he placed a white wig over his head and his two large ears poked through the top of it.

Brownie giggled and pinched Velvet Paws. Mrs Bobtail glared at him and he was silenced.

"Now, madam," Judge Hare said in a deep voice as he looked over his spectacles, "What is it you wish to know?"

"Please, sir, can you tell me what 'intelligence' is?" she said politely.

"Never heard of it!" Judge Hare said abruptly. "Is it something to eat? Or is it something to do with dogs?"

"I don't know," Mrs Bobtail replied, "but I thought you'd know."

"Of course, of course," Judge Hare muttered in a lofty tone.

"How do you spell it?" he inquired as he fumbled with some papers.

"I don't know," Mrs Bobtail said very quietly. It was a

MRS CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

dreadful ordeal to go through, and she mopped her face with the end of her apron.

"I'll look it up!" said Judge Hare abruptly. He licked his right paw and then turned over the pages of his big book at an alarming rate.

"That's rude!" Brownie shouted as he watched the paw-licking.

"No back-chat!" Judge Hare thundered as he licked and turned the pages faster than ever.

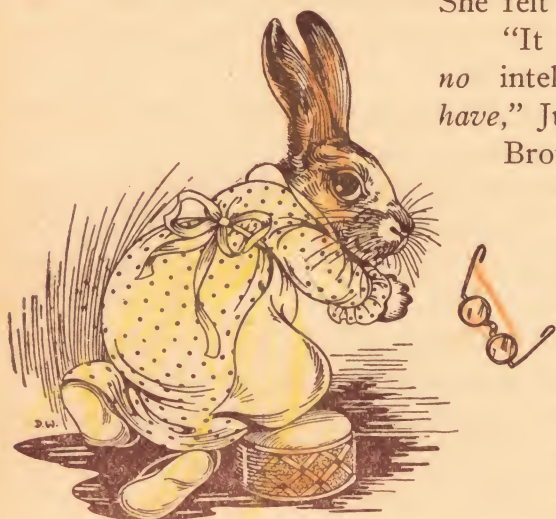
"Ah!" he said at last (in a very learned voice) "here we are: I-N-T-E-L-L-I-G-E-N-C-E"—and he bent his head nearer the page—"I thought so; only I wanted to make sure. It says: 'capacity for higher functions of the intellect.' Just so, just so. That's what I said." And with a loud bang that made the three rabbits jump, he shut his great book.

"What does that mean, sir?" Mrs Bobtail asked in a whisper. She felt so dreadfully ignorant.

"It means—that rabbits have *no* intelligence, and *never will have*," Judge Hare said shortly.

Brownie very rudely gave his nose a loud blow. Mrs Bobtail became flustered and tried to leave with all the dignity that a mother rabbit could muster. But, just as she turned to thank Judge Hare, she tripped on her skirt and fell with a flop over a footstool.

"Pick yourself up, madam," Judge Hare ordered sternly.



"Don't scalter me!" poor Mrs. Bobtail panted.

BROWNIE

"All right, all right! Don't scatter me!" poor Mrs Bobtail panted as she gathered her skirts in a bundle and pattered down the passage after Brownie and Velvet Paws. Judge Hare gave the door a loud bang as they went out, which nearly sent the knocker flying.

"What a blessing we haven't got it!" Mrs Bobtail said as she gave a sigh of relief.

"Haven't got what, mother?" Velvet Paws asked with big round eyes.

"Intelligence," her mother replied. "I'm sure that was the name of the dreadful disease your poor father died of. All his fur came off—even his whiskers."

So feeling quite happy now that everything was settled, the little family set off home again—down the track through the tall bracken and past Mrs Fox's house. She was still away. Mrs Bobtail and Velvet Paws felt very tired: little rabbit feet get tired, just like ours do. So they sat down to rest under a shady bush. In a few moments Mrs Bobtail's head was nodding, and little Velvet Paws cuddled into her mother, and in another minute they were fast asleep. Naughty Brownie had been watching out of the corner of his eye, as he had made up his mind that he'd be off on an adventure the very first moment that he could. Now he quietly stood up and tiptoed away from his mother and sister; then when he came to the bend in the track that hid him from view, he scuttled along as fast as his little legs would take him. He left the track and ran into the thick undergrowth, peering through the bushes and grass, and keeping his eyes and ears open, for goodness knows what would happen along.

"Good day!" a teeny, wee voice said. It was really a squeak.

"Good day!" Brownie replied. "Where are you?"

"Can't you see me? I'm here!" came the tiny voice again.

"Oh, there you are!" Brownie said as he caught sight of a pretty little animal who was just a tiny bit smaller than himself.

"Nice day, isn't it?" the little creature said.

MRS CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

"Can't you see it's night-time?"

"So it is! I quite forgot; I sleep all day long. Anyway, what does it matter, as long as we can play?"

"If I'm not very much mistaken, you're Mrs Rat Kangaroo's child—aren't you?" Brownie asked as he eyed the dear little creature.

"Yes, my mother's gone visiting to-day to see Mrs Musk Kangaroo. She has *two* new babies, and I *did* want mother to take me to see them. But she wouldn't. So I just sat down and cried for a while, and then I thought I'd have a game."

"Haven't you a sister to play with?" Brownie inquired. "I've a sister called Velvet Paws."

"What's a sister?"

"Oh, you know—another little animal just like you. And you can pull her ears and tail till she cries."

"No, I haven't one of those. My mother says she buys only one of us at a time."

"What does she call you?" Brownie inquired as he gazed at the dainty creature.

"She calls me 'Puffkins.'"

"That's a pretty name. You *do* look like a 'puff.' But what a long tail you have! What's it for?"

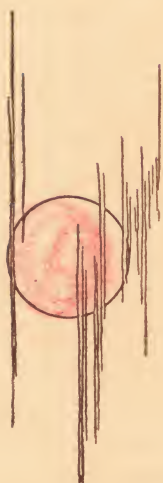
"Just watch me," Puffkins said proudly. "Mother has taught me how to use it. I've practised half an hour each night, and now I can do it."

"Do what?" Brownie asked rather jealously.

"Look!" Puffkins squeaked, as she curled her tail round a small bundle of grass and twigs, then carrying it very proudly, laid it at Brownie's feet.

"Gosh! you are clever." Brownie asked Puffkins to do it again. And when she did he laughed and laughed.

"My tail's only to sit on," he said when he had recovered from his surprise. "What do you do with those sticks and that grass?"



"Wait a moment,"

Brownie called.

DOROTHY
WALK

MRS CHIDDY AND PUFFKINS

"They are for our nest. Come with me and I'll show you where we live."

Puffkins leapt through the grass and undergrowth with remarkable speed, and used her four legs as she sprang.

"Wait a moment," Brownie called, as he tried to keep up with her.

"Here we are!" Puffkins replied as she stood beside a clump of grass.

"That's only an old grass tuft," Brownie said disappointedly. "We live in a burrow."

"That's not it," Puffkins said excitedly. "Come and peep down here." Scratching away grasses and ferns, she uncovered a small hole in the ground.

"Isn't it cosy?" she asked as she disappeared into the hole. And, wonder of wonders, she closed the doorway again with grasses and ferns!

"Where are you?" Brownie called, as he was quite unable to see even a speck of her.

"I'm here, and I'm going to sleep now," she replied. "Come back again and I'll play leapings with you."

"I must go home," Brownie said to himself, "and tell Velvet Paws all about Puffkins."

"Good-bye," he called, as he scampered away and Puffkins squeaked out "Good day."



"Here we are!" Puffkins replied



CHAPTER III

A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

ON his way home, Brownie decided it was far too good a night to be playing around the burrow, as the moon was shining and all bunnies like to scamper in the moonlight. A well-worn track branched off the main track. Brownie knew this led to a sheltered pool where the frogs played, and they were always such gay fellows to watch as they leapt in and out of the water; so scampering along he at last came to the edge of the pool. As usual, the frogs were there in great numbers, and croaking in high form. Brownie sat very still behind a tussock of grass and watched, as the frogs performed the funniest antics. Suddenly a strange little brown form crept through the grass and stood perfectly still in front of him. Brownie had never seen such a quaint looking animal before, and he stared rather rudely, or at least the stranger thought so.

"What are you staring at me like that for?" it said.

"Well—you're so funny. I can't help looking at you," Brownie replied.



"Do you ever hear yourselves called PESTS?"
Brownie asked.

JOROTHY
WALL

BROWNIE

"I'm not so rude as to stare at you like that," the little animal said. "Anyhow, you're nothing much to look at—except that you have pretty eyes and very large ears."

"What a funny nose you have," Brownie remarked.

"Oh, nonsense!" the little animal replied. "At least it is very useful."

"What's your name?" Brownie asked as his curiosity overcame him.

"Good gracious! Do you mean to say you don't know my name? It's almost unbelievable. I'm Mrs Platypus. Some people call me Mrs Duck-bill; but I like my proper name. Although I like the name the blackfellows call me best of all."

"What's that?"

"Mallangong!" Mrs Platypus replied proudly. "Don't you like that name?"

"It's all right," Brownie replied in a very cool manner. "Do you ever hear yourselves called *Pests*?"

"*Never!*" said Mrs Platypus. "I've not heard the name before. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing," Brownie replied as he idly kicked a tuft of grass. "Where do you live, Mrs Platypus?"

"By the edge of the pool. Would you like to see my home?"

"Oh yes! I'd love to!" Brownie said excitedly. "Will you take me?"

"As a great favour I will. Follow me, and step very quietly."

"Can you swim?" she asked, looking over her shoulder.

"No, my mother always told me to keep away from the water."

"Oh well—in that case, we'll have to go in by the back door. You see, I have two doors to my home, one under the water and the other above the water. I'm afraid you'll have to hold your breath as we go along the tunnel; it's not very wide," Mrs Platypus said, as they approached her home.

A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

"There's a tunnel!" Brownie said in surprise. "Why, we dig tunnels for our homes, too."

"They're splendid ideas: so safe, and nice and dark. Our tunnel's long. Is yours?"

"Oh, pretty long," Brownie answered. "How long is yours?"

"Twenty to thirty feet," Mrs Platypus said, as they came to the entrance. "Now bend your head and walk quietly I do dislike a noise."

Then very carefully Brownie entered the tunnel. It felt very damp, and smelled strongly of fish. They pattered along until they came to quite a large room.

"What a nice place!" Brownie exclaimed in surprise, as he noticed the sides and floor were lined with grass. "Isn't it soft and cosy?" he remarked, as he sat down to take a rest.

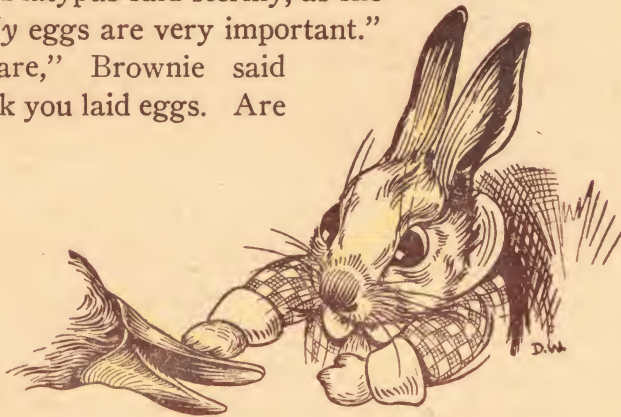
"Oh, do be careful! Mind my eggs!" Mrs Platypus cried in alarm.

"Eggs!" said Brownie disgustedly. "More eggs! Where are they?"

"Excuse me," Mrs Platypus said sternly, as she moved him a little. "My eggs are very important."

"I'm sure they are," Brownie said politely. "I did not think you laid eggs. Are there only these two?"

"Yes! that's quite enough for me to keep warm. I get tired of sitting on them and was out for a little stroll when I met you. Of course I have a pouch, you know. But it's not large enough to keep my eggs in."



"Excuse me! Is that skin over your beak?"



"Oh! do be careful!
Mind my eggs,"
Mrs. Platypus cried in alarm.



A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

"Do the babies eat grass?"

"Dear me no! When they are old enough to eat I'll feed them on freshwater snails and insects. You should see the babies grow!" (Here Mrs Platypus snapped her beak at the very thought of freshwater snails.) "And then I'll have lots of fun in the evenings teaching them to float on the water and swim."

"My goodness!" said Brownie. "You'll be kept busy. Excuse me!" he said, as he put up a paw to feel Mrs Platypus's beak. "Is that *skin* over your beak?"

"It is," she replied. "See my nostrils at the end of my beak. And best of all—I've pouches in my cheeks to store my food in."

"Would you mind if I have a look?" Brownie asked.

"Oh, not to-night. And goodness me, I've forgotten the eggs! I hope they're not cold. I'll sit on them and talk to you." She settled herself comfortably on the eggs and gave a sigh of relief.

"Are they all right?" Brownie inquired anxiously.

"Yes, praise be——," Mrs Platypus replied. "The last time I was sitting I took a little stroll—just like to-night. I must have been away longer than I thought. When I came back the eggs were stone cold. They had caught a chill and died."

"How dreadful," Brownie murmured. "Was Mr Platypus very angry?"

"Oh, no. He's an even-tempered man. I just hurried out and brought him in a few water snails, and he soon forgot the incident," Mrs Platypus said as she gave a snuggle.

"How do the babies eat the snails? Have they teeth?" Brownie inquired.

"Indeed they have! Proper grinders, too. Mine are only little horny things, but as I said, the babies have real grinders. Talking about horns and things, my husband has a spur on his hind leg; but I have none."

"Can you kick?" Brownie asked very puzzled.

"I can claw—if that's what you mean. Look at my feet. Did you notice them?"

BROWNIE



Mrs. Platypus has webbed hind feet and very strong claws.



This wonderful front foot of Mrs. Platypus has a paddle-like web.



Mrs. Platypus prefers her nostrils near the tip of her beak.



The lower mandible of Mrs. Platypus's beak is much smaller than the upper.

A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

"Aren't they funny!" he exclaimed as he gazed at her toes.

"They're fairly large and wide, I know."

"And what's that funny stuff in between your toes?"

"Those are webs," Mrs Platypus explained. "That's the reason I am able to swim so well. Now you watch what I can do with my front toes."

She pulled the web right back, so that the claws stood out looking very strong.

"If I want to do any digging, I pull the webs back so that my claws are exposed. Now you take a look at your feet. You've pads under your toes; but I have not, and they are quite bare."

"You're a funny animal I think . . . I don't mean to be rude." Brownie was so amazed at everything he saw and heard that he just had to say something.

"Well, perhaps I *am* strange," Mrs Platypus said. "But I must be valuable; because men are not allowed to catch me now."

"Then you needn't keep looking about for traps all the time you are out, and you're not afraid of being made into a pie?" Brownie asked, more surprised than ever.

Mrs Platypus gave a yawn. "Not a scrap! Now I don't want to hurry you; but I think it's time you went home. I'm sleepy and I must take a nap."

"Thank you, Mrs Platypus, for showing me your home. When the babies are hatched, may I come and see them?"

"Certainly. Now go out quietly."

So Brownie tiptoed along the tunnel and out on to the grass again. He sat down for a minute to look at his toes and feel his nose. Such curious animals lived in the bush that he'd quite forgotten what he was like himself.

"I must hurry home," he said to himself, "as Mrs Fox may be about." And at the very thought of such a dreadful thing he started to run, and kept on running. As he neared Farmer

BROWNIE

Skinty's he suddenly felt very hungry, and the thought of the young lettuce-leaves made his mouth water.

"Farmer Skinty will be asleep, and I'll just nibble a few of his plants—not a lot, 'cause he might catch me again."

Running through the garden, Brownie was soon eating his supper. After filling his tummy with good things, he began to romp all over the tomato plants. He pretended Mrs Fox was hiding in the vines. In and out he jumped, kicking the plants as he went.

"Take that! old Mother Fox," he cried, as he smacked a lovely red tomato off the vine. "And that! and that!" he shouted, smacking the red fruit. They fell with such a lovely thud; some even burst as they hit the ground.

"She's burst!" he cried loudly with laughter as he went on to the next one.

"Hullo! What are you up to?"

"Oh!" Brownie gasped, as he stood perfectly still.

"What are you up to?"

"I'm just looking at the tomatoes, and I'm not touching one—I'm just looking," Brownie whimpered with fright.

"Looks like it—doesn't it?" the voice replied. "But you needn't be frightened of me. I steal Farmer Skinty's potatoes, and his plums, and peaches. He's always trying to catch me; but he's so clumsy that he can't, and I just sit and laugh at him."

"You gave me such a fright, my tail shook with trembles," Brownie replied as he looked at this new animal.

"Poof! you haven't much of a tail to get 'trembles' in. They must be very small trembles. Look at my tail—*it* gets very shuddery when I am frightened. It's so large the shudders have to run all over and through it. Any one can see what big shakes they must be."

"Goodness!" Brownie said, as he looked at the beautiful fluffy long tail. "Are you Mrs Possum?"



"Take that! old Mother Fox,"
he cried.



BROWNIE

"No! I'm not!"

"Well, who are you? You look just like Mrs Possum."

"I'm Mrs Opossum; and please remember the O."

"Oh!" Brownie exclaimed.

"That's it!" his new friend said with satisfaction.

"It's too long to say every time. May I call you Mrs Possum?" Brownie asked politely. "I don't mind if you call me Brown, for short."

"Well, you may call me Mrs Possum if you come and help me to steal some plums."

"All right! Where are they?"

"In the wash-house," Mrs Possum said excitedly. "And there's heaps of potatoes there, too. Farmer Skinty thinks he's hidden them; but I was watching from my gum-tree. All day long he and Mrs Skinty carried baskets of plums and potatoes, and hid them in there. I heard him say he'd screw my neck. Such cruelty and rudeness I've never heard of before."

"I bit the buttons off his shirt, and I chewed through his flips that he keeps his trousers up with," Brownie said proudly.

"Come on, let's hurry!" Mrs Possum said excitedly. "I'm hungry."

They hurried across to the wash-house, and to their dismay found the door shut.

"Let's have a look at the windows," Mrs Possum advised. "I often crawl in through windows."

But the windows were shut.

"That's the meanest thing I've ever heard of," Brownie said as he gave the wash-house a good kick.

Mrs Possum had climbed up a tree growing at the side of the window, and, as she flattened her nose against the window and peered in, she nearly fell off her perch with excitement.

"Gobbles and gobbles!" she exclaimed at the top of her voice

A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

"The copper's full of plums, and the tubs too, and the potatoes are all over the floor. Shudder my tail, if there's not pumpkins in there, too. We'll have to get in. They'll go bad if we don't eat some of them."

"But we can't get in!" Brownie said disappointedly.

"No such word as *can't*. Sit there for a minute, while I have a 'discovery.'"

And so saying, Mrs Possum climbed higher up the tree, then very cleverly she took a leap through the air and landed on the



"Gobbles and Gobbles!"
she exclaimed.

roof of the wash-house. She scampered all over it, and then peered down the chimney. "Gobbles and gobbles!" she exclaimed. "I can smell plums and potatoes most beautifully down there." Then rushing to the edge of the roof she called out.

"I say, Brown—are you still there?"

"I'm as still as I can be," Brownie replied in a whisper.



They went flying through the air.

A VISIT TO MRS PLATYPUS

"Well, come up here," Mrs Possum whispered back.

"I can't climb," Brownie replied in dismay.

"Stupid creature," Mrs Possum muttered. "Wait a minute." Leaning over the edge of the roof she called out very quietly: "I'll come down and carry you up on my back."

"Hurry up, then. I'm so frightened of Farmer Skinty."

"We'll skin Farmer Skinty's plums—that's what we'll do," Mrs Possum replied as she took a flying leap into the tree, and climbing down very quickly, reached Brownie's side.

"You should just *smell* them," she cried dancing up and down, "come up and have a sniff."

"I can't climb," Brownie whispered again.

"Hop on my back and hold very tightly. I'll take you up," Mrs Possum answered gladly.

It was a funny sight to see the little rabbit take a hop right on to Mrs Possum's back.

"Hang on!" she said in a whisper. She grunted and puffed as she climbed. Brownie was very heavy after his lettuce-leaf supper, and very nearly as big as his friend. She struggled up until they reached a branch that ran out almost level with the top of the roof; but there was a gap of almost ten feet.

"How are we going to get across there?" Brownie whispered.

"Hang on—I'm going to fly." Before Brownie could say anything Mrs Possum took a leap and went flying through the air.

"Plunk!" They landed right on the roof, and Brownie was too surprised to say a word.

"Get off!" Mrs Possum said. "You've puffed me." Brownie flopped off her back. "How do you fly like that?" he asked when he had recovered his breath.

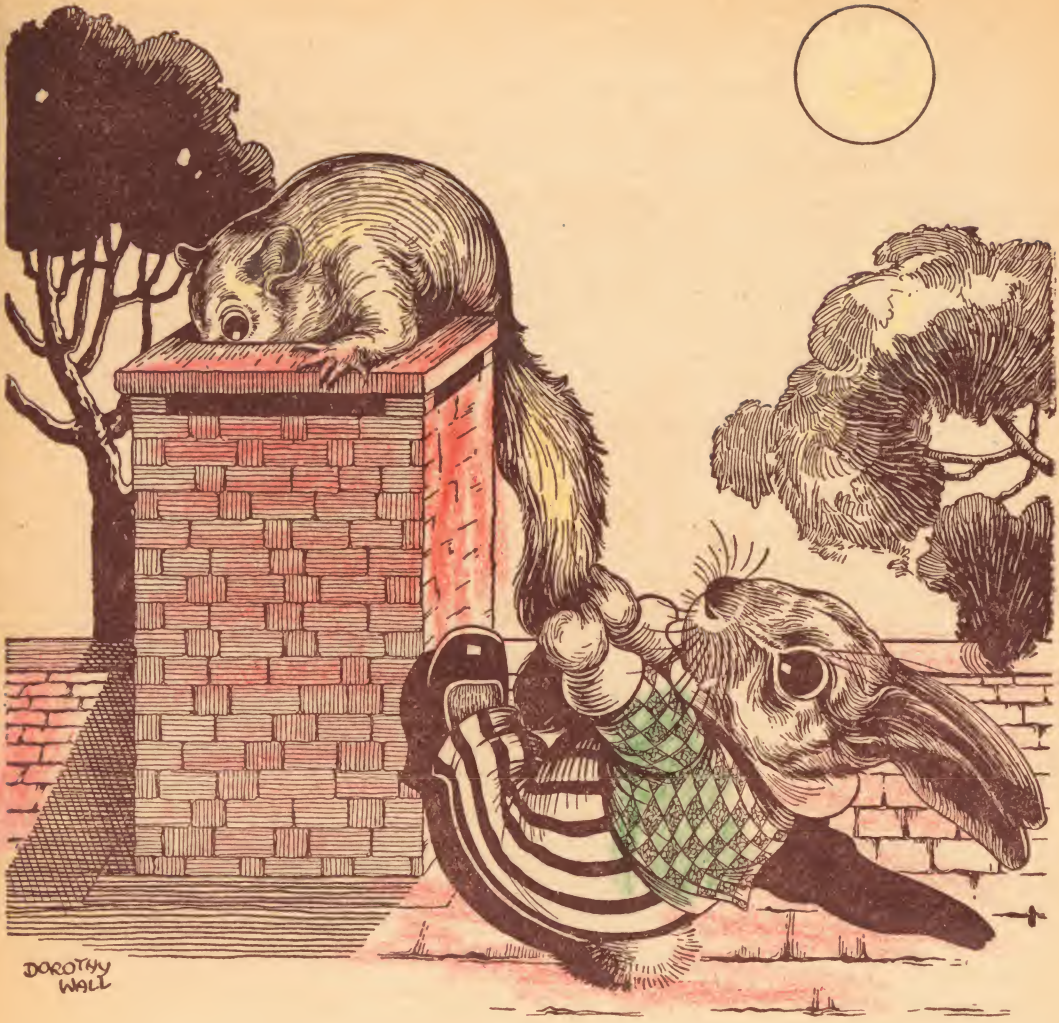
"Look at my wings," she replied, and showed Brownie the peculiar flap of skin and fur running along each side of her body.

BROWNIE

"I like to take a leap and land a little higher up a tree than I intend," she exclaimed as she shook herself. "It deadens the shock of landing. But here it was different, and I had to jump 'flat out'; so I puffed out first in order that I would not hurt myself when I landed."

"I wish I had wings!" Brownie sighed.





“Oh goodness! don't leave me here on the roof!” Brownie replied with fright.



CHAPTER IV

THE ROBBERS

“COME and smell these plums and potatoes instead!” Mrs Possum replied. “Over here. Mind you don’t slip and fall off the roof.”

She led the way round to the chimney and poked her head down it as far as it would go.

“Scrumptious!” she panted as she withdrew her head. “For goodness’ sake have a sniff!”

“How can I get up?” Brownie asked dismally.

“I suppose I’ll have to lend you my back again,” his friend replied. As she bent down Brownie scrambled up.

“Poke your head down the chimney,” she said excitedly. Brownie poked as far as he could.

“Golly!” he exclaimed. “It smells like jam and stew all mixed up. But it’s so black down there, it’s a wonder the smell can get up.”

“We’re going down after that smell,” Mrs Possum declared, as Brownie jumped off her back.

THE ROBBERS

"But it's so black, and a long way down," he replied, rather frightened.

"Think of the supper waiting for us," Mrs Possum said as she twitched her tail.

"Well—you go first," Brownie said in a meek voice.

"Poof! I'm not afraid." And Mrs Possum started to scramble to the chimney-top. She paused a moment to think. "Here—Brown, you'd better hop on my back and wait in the chimney-top while I go down. If you don't do that, you'll never be able to climb up."

"Oh goodness! Don't leave me here on the roof!" Brownie replied with fright, as he thought of Farmer Skinty. It was a scramble, and a great deal of scratching and clawing completed the operation.

"Hang on, and don't fall down the chimney before your turn," Mrs Possum said, as she poked her head down once more.

"I'm going to fill with 'puff'!" (She took a deep breath.)

"And then I'll land safely."

"But I can't fill with 'puff,'" Brownie wailed. "What'll I do?"

"Take a chance!"

Before he had time to ask where he'd get a chance from, Mrs Possum disappeared out of sight.

"Plunk! Plunk!" came up the chimney.

Brownie poked his head down and gazed into the blackness.

"Are you alive?" he called.

"Of course I am," Mrs Possum called back. "Wait up there till I have a look round."

"Is it black down there?"

"As black as a nigger in a coal-hole! And I'm covered with soot."

"I think I'll stay up here, if you don't mind," Brownie called down the chimney.

BROWNIE

"You'll miss all the supper, and the smell's more scrumptious than ever, down here ——," and Mrs Possum sniffed very loudly. She found herself in quite a large open space. But oh, the soot! It was in her eyes, up her nose, and everywhere. She carefully crawled along on her tummy until she felt something hard and cold right up against her nose. She put up her paw to feel, and found it was the door of the fire-place; but how she was going to open it goodness only knew. She tried to claw it; but her claws would not grasp the hard iron. Then she tried to put her paw underneath it; but the space was too small. Leaning against the door and pressing very tightly, she managed to screw herself round so that her nose faced the opposite way. She became used to the darkness and could now see the grating on which she was standing, and in front of that the bricks started that made the chimney. Suddenly she caught sight of a loose brick. Crawling up to it, she touched it with her paw. It moved——

"Soot and cinders!" she cried. "Here's a way out!"

Clawing at the brick, she rolled it away, and clawed again until an open space appeared. She sniffed and took a look. "That space is not large enough for me to get through. I must get help," she said to herself. Joy of joys! When she looked through the hole she could see light. Oh, the smell! It was stronger than ever. Creeping over the hole she peered up the chimney.

"Hi! you up there!" she called. "Come down here and give me some help."

Brownie was gazing down the chimney, and nearly fell in with fright when he heard the command.

"How can I get down?" he asked, trembling.

"Jump!"

"But I'll take my life in my hands if I jump down there."

"Well put it in your feet instead, and come quickly," Mrs Possum cried impatiently.

THE ROBBERS

"Oh! Oh! I can't jump down there!" he answered, really terrified at the thought.

"Shut your eyes and just jump," his friend replied. "If you don't hurry up I'll leave you on the roof, and Farmer Skinty will get you in the morning."

"Oh goodness!" Brownie cried.

"Hurry up! I'll count three, and you be down here on the three. One—*Two*—THREE."

With a frightful noise and scratching, down came Brownie, bringing a bucket of soot with him. Coughing, sneezing, and choking with fright, he landed right on Mrs Possum.

"Look out!" she screamed. "You're squashing me."

"Can't help it," Brownie replied. "I came with such a rush." The two little animals grunted and wriggled until they were able to separate themselves.

"That's a silly thing to do," Mrs Possum said angrily.

"Well—you're silly to ask me to jump down," Brownie said crossly, as he still felt very frightened.

"Well, we're down—that's all that matters," his friend replied as she sneezed again. "I want your help to dig out a brick."

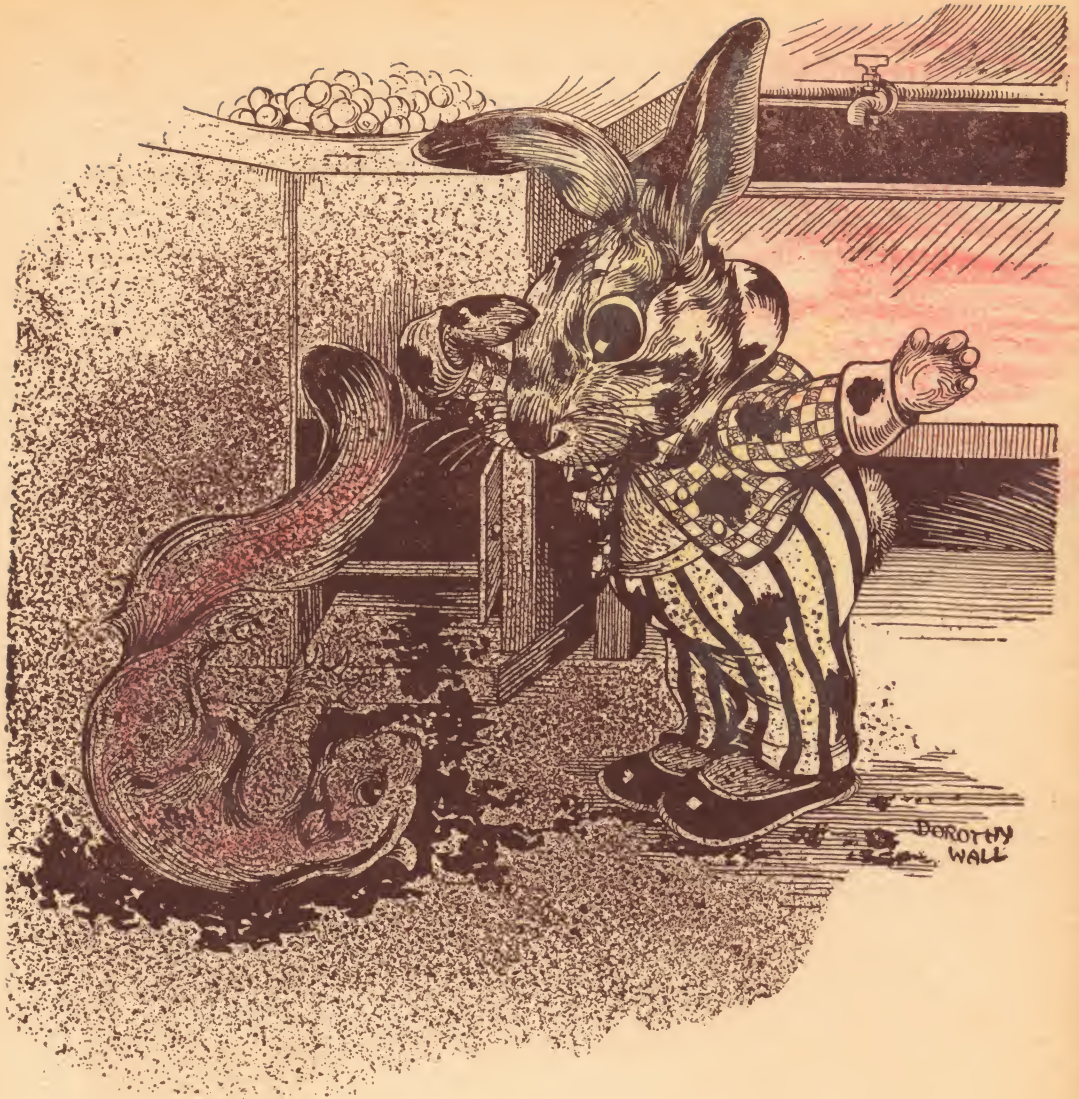
"I'm good at digging," Brownie said, feeling much braver now.

"Where is it?"

"This way," Mrs Possum said as she crawled along. "See this? I've managed to move one brick out of the way; but the hole isn't large enough. We'll have to dig another out."



Down came
Brownie.



"Goodness!" Brownie exclaimed,
"You do look funny!"

THE ROBBERS

"I'll do the digging," Brownie replied. "Keep clear." And he set to, with a will. The dust and soot flew out behind him—and right into Mrs Possum's face.

"Hey! Stop that!" she shouted. "Can't you dig without all that flying up business?"

"It's got to come out," Brownie replied as he sent another shower of dirt over Mrs Possum.

"Thunder and grasshoppers!" she cried. "If you shower me with any more, I'll jump *up* the chimney and leave you here."

But another shower of soot and dirt greeted her, and she received a mouthful just as she was talking.

"You dirty young rabbit!" she cried with rage. But just then the brick came hurtling down and struck her right on the nose.

"Look out!" Brownie cried, as the brick flew out. But he was too late in calling. The damage was done.

"I'm stuck!" Mrs Possum called in alarm. "I'm jammed between the brick and the door."

"Just keep quiet and don't get excited. I'll get you out," Brownie replied. "I've a lovely big hole here to crawl through," and without waiting another moment, he slipped through and was down on the flooring under the copper fire-place. Crawling out, he stood up and shook himself violently.

"Tishoo!" he sneezed. "I'm full of dirt."

Bang! bang! went the door of the fire-place. "Oh, of course," he thought, "I must get Mrs Possum out."

"Hold fast; I'm coming," he called out encouragingly.

Bang! bang! bang!

"Oh, bother her!—She's so impatient," Brownie grumbled as he blinked soot out of his eyes. "Just a moment till I see where I am." Then groping his way round the fire-place he at last felt the door.

"Pull it! Pull it!" Mrs Possum cried loudly from inside.

BROWNIE

Brownie gave a tremendous pull, and out fell Mrs Possum amid a cloud of soot and ashes.

"Goodness!" Brownie exclaimed. "You *do* look funny!"

"Oh! Oh!" Mrs Possum gasped. "I'm full of soot." She stood up very slowly, then shaking herself violently, she showered soot and ashes all over a bundle of clean clothes that Mrs Farmer Skinty had left in a neat pile in her laundry basket on the floor. Mrs Possum caught sight of them and, alas and alack for the clean clothes!

"Come and have a rub down," she said to Brownie. "You look terribly grubby." Then she hopped into the middle of the basket, followed by Brownie, and the two of them rolled and rolled, shaking the soot off themselves and covering Mrs Skinty's snow-white linen with it.

"Ah! That feels better," Mrs Possum said, as she stood up to take a look round.

"Just look at the plums!" she cried, jumping out of the basket and on to the copper.

"Give me a leg up!" Brownie implored.

"Grab my tail and pull yourself up," his friend replied, as she hung her tail down over the side. Brownie grabbed it, and hauled himself up beside her.

"I'm a good friend to you," Mrs Possum said, as she stared coldly at Brownie. "I don't suppose I'll get any thanks for all I've done."

"You're wasting time," Brownie retorted, as he nibbled a plum. Suddenly Mrs Possum realized where she was, with plums, plums, plums everywhere. She jumped right into the middle of them and gobbled and nibbled as fast as she could. She was very wasteful: just one bite and the plum was tossed out of the copper and on to the floor. Soon dozens of the fruit littered the room, and the munching still continued.

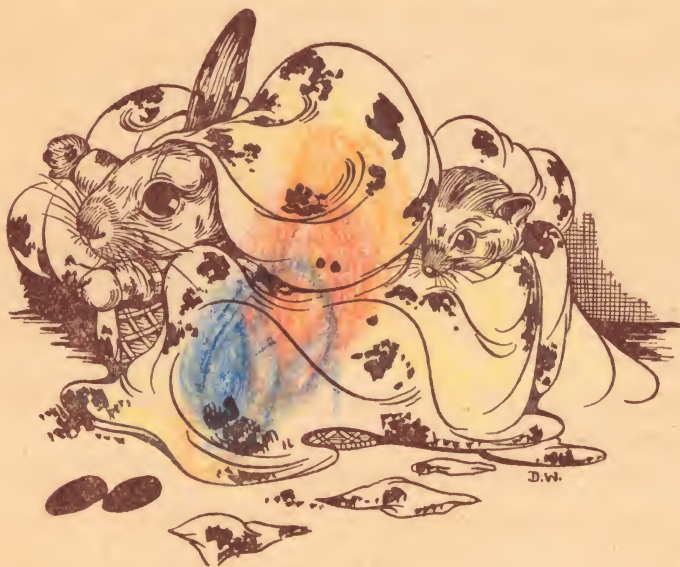
THE ROBBERS

But Brownie did not eat. After his first taste of a plum, he spat it out very rudely and looked disappointedly around him.

"What's the matter?" Mrs Possum inquired with amazement.

"I don't like plums!" he answered, sucking his paw.

"Try some carrots," she advised. "There's bunches and bunches of them down in the far corner."



They covered Mrs. Skinty's snow
white linen with soot.

Brownie jumped off the copper and trotted over to the carrots. He tasted one, and then, he had no doubts left.

"Carrots are beautiful!" he said, with his mouth full. "Come and have some."

Mrs Possum was down in a twinkling, and together they ate several bunches. Not eating them nicely; but taking a bite here, a gobble there, and making the whole lot look as though a dozen

BROWNIE

rats had chewed them. Then they tasted the potatoes. But their hunger had left them, so they looked around to see what else they could destroy.

"What's that funny looking thing over there?" Brownie asked, as he pointed to Mrs Skinty's rubbing board.

"Looks like something to slide down," Mrs Possum replied, as she walked over to investigate. The rubbing board stood against a sack of potatoes. Mrs Possum cautiously felt it all over, then deciding that it was nothing dangerous, she thought a slide down would be great fun.

"Come on," she said, "let's try it."

The two little animals climbed the sack of potatoes, or rather Mrs Possum did, and helped Brownie up with her tail again.

"You go first," Mrs Possum said. "I went down the chimney first."

"Well, let me get there," Brownie replied as he pushed her away.

With one leg on the board, and still clinging to the bag, he called out at the top of his voice:

"Three cheers for Mrs Skinty and her carrots," and with a bump he slid down the board, and with a bang landed on the floor.

"Three cheers for Farmer Skinty and his plums," Mrs Possum cried as she followed head first down the board. Whoop—wallop! she landed on her nose, and it made her so angry that she turned round and bit the board.

"I'll kick it to bits," she cried, and scratched and clawed with all her might; but it made little impression on the hard board.

Meanwhile Brownie had been investigating, and discovered a sack full of corn in a corner. He nibbled a hole in the side, and out came a yellow stream of corn. "Look what I've found!" he cried with glee. Mrs Possum scuttled over to the corn and tasted it.



The most dreadful thing happened. She sneezed !!

BROWNIE

"Let's get inside it," she said, as she sprang on top of the sack and kicked piles of it out on to the floor. She dug down and down, scattering the corn everywhere. Just as things were at their very height, a heavy step sounded outside the door and the lock was turned.

"Farmer Skinty!" they both cried in one breath. And Mrs Possum huddled up as tightly as she could in a corner of the sack.

"Oh! Oh! Where will I hide?"

Brownie cried in terror. He made for the fire-place, just as the door opened and Farmer Skinty stepped into the room. He crept in very quietly, closing the door behind him. Striking a match and lighting a candle, he stood there as if glued to the spot—his eyes simply popped with amazement as he looked at the ruin on the floor.

"I must be seeing double!" he muttered as he rubbed his eyes. Then took another look.

"Great ghosts!" he cried in anger. "I'll find you whatever you are and you'll not get out of here alive! Look at my plums! and my corn! And just look at my wife's washing!"

He put the candle on top of the copper just as Brownie very quietly closed the door of the fire-place. "Come out of it!" he cried in dreadful shouts as he scrummaged round in the clothes-basket, panting and puffing in a dreadful manner.

"I'll skin you, whiskers and all! Just wait until I lay my hands on you!" he shouted. Then, to make quick work of it all, he tipped all the clothes on the floor. But nothing was there.



"Three cheers for Mrs. Skinty
and her carrots."

THE ROBBERS

"Doddering ducks!" he screamed. "I won't even bother to skin you—into the garbage fire you'll go."

He simply pounded round the room, slipping on the plums, and bumping against boxes and gardening tools. Brownie lay huddled up in the fire-place, shivering with fright, while Mrs Possum screwed one eye up as she peeped through the hole in the corn-sack.

"He's ramping," she muttered to herself. Just then the most dreadful of all dreadful things happened. She sneezed!

"Ah—ha!" Farmer Skinty yelled with rage. "So that's where you are." Then he made a lunge at the corn-sack. Poor Mrs Possum went as white as a sheet as a great grimy hand came down the sack and seized her by the tail.

"A possum! And the one I've waited for all this time," Farmer Skinty cried with rage. His whiskers *shook* with anger.

Mrs Possum made no noise at all. She lay as limp as a rag. Every bone in her body seemed dead. She even stopped breathing.

"Ha! You're dead!" Farmer Skinty said with relief. "Well that'll save me lighting a fire to burn you. I'll not be worried with you any more." And striding over to the door he flung it open wide and, shoosh!—out went Mrs Possum, right on her tail. At the same moment there was a rush and a scuttle, and Farmer Skinty was just in time to see a little white tail flash out into the night.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said, as he stood rooted to the spot. "Possum and rabbit! I'll find elephants next!"

Brownie dashed away as fast as his legs could carry him. It was a narrow escape! Then he heard steps running behind him.

"Don't, don't," he cried in terror. "I'm going as fast as I can."

"It's only me!" Mrs Possum panted as she caught up with him.

BROWNIE

"You!" cried Brownie, scarcely able to believe his eyes and ears. "He said you were dead!"

"I was playing 'possum,'" she laughed, "and he'll have to catch me all over again."

"Do let's get away from here," Brownie said, still very frightened.

"I'm going home for a rest in my gum-tree," Mrs Possum said, as she bade Brownie good night.

"And I'm going home too!" And Brownie scampered along the track to the burrow. Then he grew a wee bit afraid. He'd been away from home for such a long time. Perhaps his mother would be angry, and, as she never got cross with Velvet Paws, he felt rather angry with his little sister.

"Sisters never want to go on adventures," he said to himself. "They always keep with their mothers. But I'm *glad* I'm a boy, and I don't care if I do get a whipping. I'll pull Velvet Paws's ears if I do."

He dawdled along the track now that he was nearer home, and he simply could *not* get the thought out of his mind that his mother might be angry.

"What was that?"

"Brownie, Brownie, *Brownie*."

"My word, she's cross," he said as he heard his mother's voice. "I don't think I'll go home."

But, somehow his little feet still kept on the track that led to his home. All at once he caught sight of a very angry mother coming down the track, and, oh goodness! she had a stick in her hand.

"I'm coming, mother," he called as he started to run.

"You bad boy, where have you been? Come here at once!"

"I've been talking to Mrs Platypus." And Brownie began to cry.

"Well, you're going to be punished all the same!" Mrs Bobtail

THE ROBBERS

replied as she grabbed him by the ears. "No son of mine is going to stay out all night." And she gave Brownie two whacks across his little tail.

"Is it over?" Brownie whimpered as Mrs Bobtail threw her stick away.

"Come home to bed!" she said sternly as she marched him to the burrow.

Little Velvet Paws was waiting outside, wide-eyed, and thinking what a dreadfully naughty rabbit Brownie was. "Did you spank him?" she asked her mother as she gazed at Brownie, the hem of her dress in her mouth.

"Yes! and he's going to bed for *two* days. And he'll have a dose of cascara, and dry thistle-tops to eat," Mrs Bobtail said as she glared at her son.

"Isn't he naughty?" Velvet Paws whispered.

And he was naughty. Just to make matters worse he gave Velvet Paws's ear a savage tug, and when his mother was not looking he actually *bit* the corner of her dress.

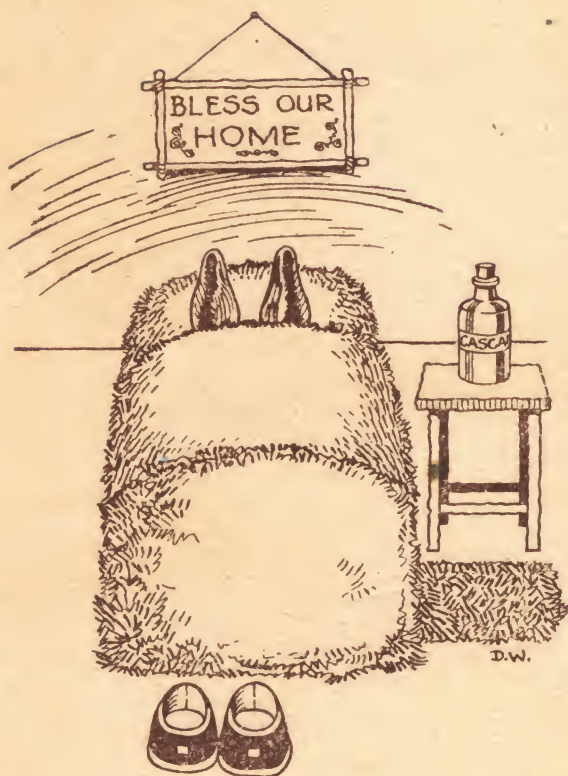
"Come now!" Mrs Bobtail said as she entered the burrow. "If you are good children, I'll take you for a picnic to-morrow down to Farmer Skinty's garden." So the three little rabbits disappeared in their home.

Let us all hope Farmer Skinty's garden is not completely ruined.





"You bad boy, where have you been?"



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